



Telemedicine in proctology through public communication platforms: comfort or danger zone?

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Dear Sir,

We read with great interest the study entitled “Use of telemedicine in the postoperative assessment of proctological patients: a case–control study”, by Gaj, et al. [1], describing the implementation and associated benefits of the popular “WhatsApp” application for follow-up purposes after proctological procedures. Although we strongly agree that the incorporation of modern technology in the framework of telemedicine is of paramount importance, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, having similar positive experience from our host institutions, we would like to point out the existence of some relevant, potentially hazardous, medico-legal implications.

Even though the authors correctly obtained ethical approval from their unit and also informed consent from the patients, we strongly believe that the use of a public platform for sharing patients’ private data, even in the context of strict communication between patient and surgeon, could lead to serious legal incidents if the material is potentially subject to data breach/hacking/unintentional leak to third parties. In our opinion, the providers of the social media/public communication platforms themselves, in the event of sharing such types of strictly personal information, should be consulted and relevant documentation should be included in the study information leaflets and patient consent forms. The latter is a minimum safety barrier to ensure legal cover for the surgeons and their institutions, as well as a safety net

for protection of patients’ privacy. We strongly believe that telemedicine in any form should only be conducted through dedicated institutional platforms and software, ideally within the medical facilities themselves, in order to avoid potential data protection issues.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval None required.

Informed consent Not required.

Reference

1. Gaj F, Peracchini M, Passannanti D, Quaresima S, Giovanardi F, Lai Q (2022) Use of telemedicine in the postoperative assessment of proctological patients: a case-control study. *Tech Coloproctol*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10151-022-02723-9>

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